

## **Need for Coordination of Special Transportation Services**

Multiple studies, including the 1990 Carter Goble Associates report named the “Coordinated Elderly and Handicapped Transportation Services Study and Plan for Lincoln, Nebraska,” and the more recent “Community Services Implementation Plan” (C-SIP), developed in 2002 by the C-SIP Transportation Coalition, have found that there is a need to coordinate the various special transportation services in order to better serve the Lincoln/Lancaster community. With coordinated services, it is believed that the duplication of programs will be decreased, and operating costs related to driver training, insurance coverage, maintenance, and vehicle storage (among others) will be lower thus creating cost savings that can be used to expand service or provide current service at a lower cost.

The Carter Goble report found that transportation is a very high priority for nearly all of the agencies providing some level of special transportation service to their clients. These agencies have cited financial and capital resource constraints as reasons why all of the needs of the community are not being met. During the Carter Goble research effort, many of these agencies expressed concern that as the Lincoln population ages, demand for special transportation services will increase. It was also found that there is a gap between the demand for such service and the amount of service able to be offered by local agencies. Given the recognition by the provider agencies of the rising demand for this type of service, the financial constraint these agencies face, and the gap in service provision, the Carter Goble report found that it is logical to consider the restructuring of transportation services with the goal of making available more transportation services for the target population. This restructuring involves the coordination of services. A fully coordinated special transportation program could potentially increase the level of available services and/or reduce the overall service costs by up to 25%.

A recommendation of the Community Services Implementation Plan (C-SIP) stated the need to focus efforts on those particular populations that need special transportation services. With a number of small agencies trying to help their clients gain access to services in an uncoordinated system, serious financial and coordination issues are prevalent. There are many agencies trying to meet the transportation needs of their clients, creating a duplication of exclusive services that is highly inefficient and expensive to run. A series of steps over time are recommended as part of the C-SIP effort that would move the City and County toward a coordinated system that would meet the needs of more people for less money. The hiring of a temporary full-time position for the sole purpose of coordinating an initial pilot program that would establish a limited coordinated system is the first step and recommendation. Over time, with changes made as lessons are learned on how to best serve the community, additional agencies and providers can be added to the coordination program. Ultimately a permanent non-profit special transportation services agency could be established.

Perhaps the best source for explaining the idea and need for establishing a pilot program to begin coordination of special transportation services is a current effort by The League of Human Dignity. The purpose of the League’s effort is to obtain enough funding to implement a coordinated transportation program for the Lincoln community through a public-private partnership comprised of 4-6 current transportation providers. Funding is being requested for expenses related to hiring a Transportation Coordinator who would be responsible for working out all necessary details in

getting the program operational and self-sustaining within three years. Funding requests have been submitted to charitable foundations which are currently receiving possible consideration for funding. In total, the pilot program is planned to evolve over a three year period at a total cost of \$275,000. Such grant applications represent the cumulative effort of many community discussions, work by the C-SIP Transportation Coalition and other concerned community groups, as well as the results of community surveys, all of which have led to the same conclusion: coordination of transportation services is needed in the Lincoln community.

The Transportation Coordination Work Group has taken the lead in developing this effort. This Work Group evolved from the three facilitated community discussions on transportation coordination that the Woods Charitable Foundation, Inc. supported last year. Members of this collaborative work group are: Wende Baker, Director of the Community Health Partners Foundation; DeAnn Hughes, C-SIP Project Manager; Mike Schafer, Director of The League of Human Dignity; and, Larry Worth, Director, and Brian Praeuner, Planner, with StarTran. The Work Group will continue to oversee the project. The League of Human Dignity will be the fiscal agent, and will also be providing a \$5,000 cash match. StarTran will also match the project by providing in-kind office space and technical assistance/supervision for the Transportation Coordinator (estimated total value: \$39,229).

In recognition of the need to coordinate special transportation services, the goal of the effort is to implement a coordinated pilot transportation program through a public-private partnership comprised of 4-6 current transportation providers. A staff Transportation Coordinator, for whom funding is being requested, would implement the pilot program. Such a pilot program would be initiated, with a phased implementation, over a three-year period, as follows:

Year 1: Achieve Level “C” Coordination by:

- ▶ Secure pilot participating transportation providers
- ▶ Ascertain formal commitments
- ▶ Develop initial cooperative programs among participants, to include:
  - ▶ Information and referral
  - ▶ Driver pre-employment screening
  - ▶ Driver training programs
  - ▶ Accident investigation program
  - ▶ Coordination of bulk purchases
  - ▶ Potential coordinated escort service
  - ▶ Potential insurance purchase pool
  - ▶ Standardized/centralized maintenance
  - ▶ Centralized vehicle storage
- ▶ Evaluate resultant savings and/or additional special services trips provided in order to initiate Level “B” Coordination.

Year 2: Achieve Level “B” Coordination by:

- ▶ Initiate vehicle and ride sharing (Scenario “B”)
- ▶ Market/promotion programs
- ▶ Document successes/Evaluate resultant services and/or additional special services trips provided in order to initiate Level “A” Coordination

Year 3: Achieve Level “A” Coordination by:

- ▶ Implement central reservation/dispatch among pilot participants (Scenario “A”)
- ▶ Pursue/secure additional transportation providers to participate in, and expand, program
- ▶ Pursue/secure long-term funding of program
- ▶ Evaluate resultant savings and/or additional special services trips provided

In general, with continued expansion, assessment, and tweaking of a pilot coordination program, it is anticipated that special transportation services in Lincoln/Lancaster will become more available to more people in need for less cost. This idea of coordination of services, and this grant application effort is supported by the Multi-Modal Transportation Study and will be a part of its final plan.

It is possible, with continued success and expansion of a pilot program for special transportation services over time, that this form and level of service could be expanded to include non-elderly and non-disabled members of the community. The Carter Goble Associates report indicates that it may be beneficial for the City and County to consider opening the door-to-door coordinated service to members of the non-elderly or handicapped once services to these populations are fully coordinated. With possible route studies implemented in the future as an outgrowth of the Multi-Modal Transportation Study effort, this idea may be given further credence as a viable addition to the local transit system.